

:: D E I R D R E ::

A Drama in Three Acts, by A.E.

Being Number Four of the

Tower Press Booklets---Second

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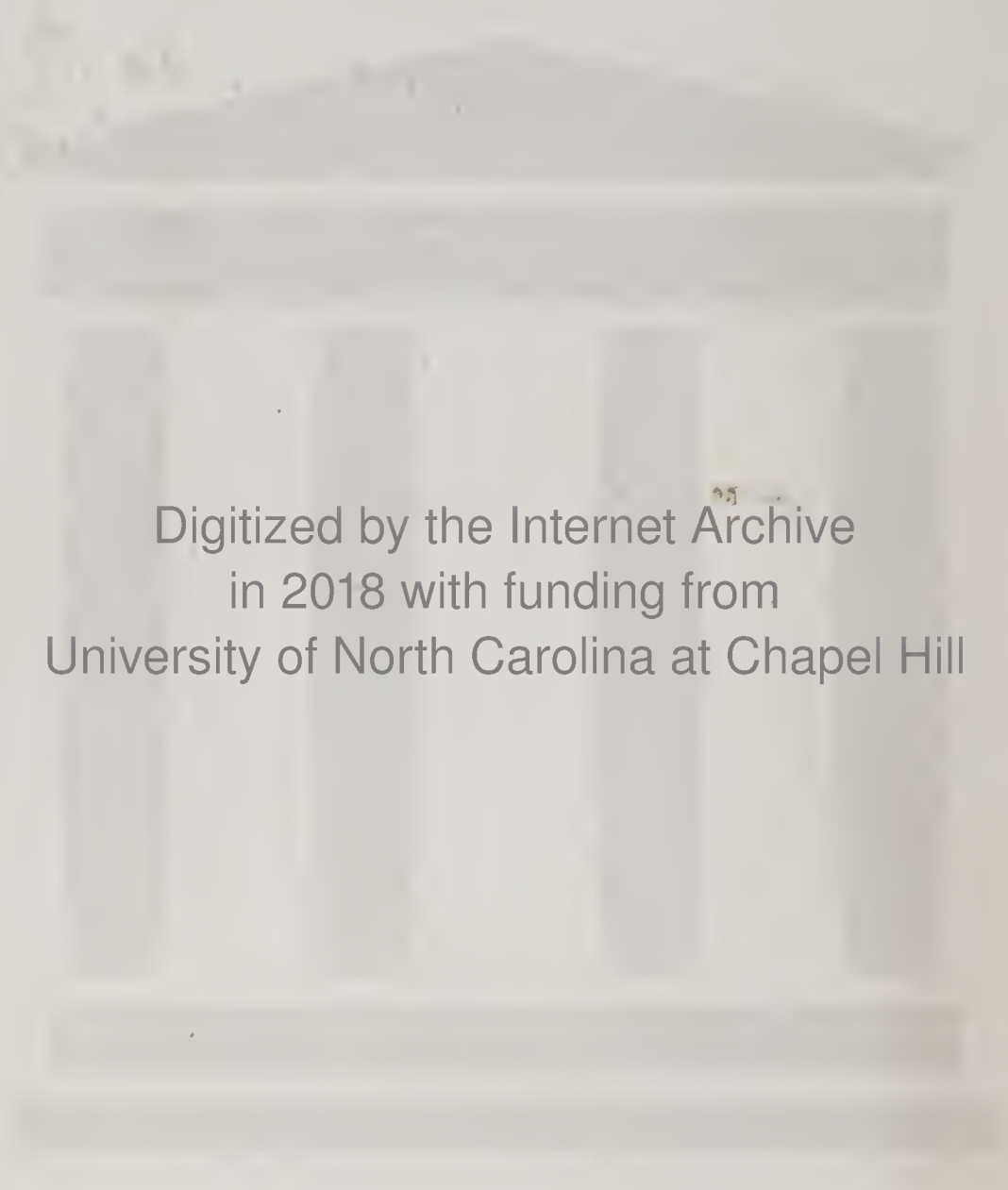
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from Hall Alexander

DEIRDRE

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To
SEUMAS O'SULLIVAN.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ :

CONCOBAR Ardrie of Ulla

NAISI

AINLE }
ARDAN } Brothers of Naisi

FERGUS

BUINNE }
ILANN } Sons of Fergus

CATHVAH A Druid

DEIRDRE

LAVARCAM A Druidess

HERDSMAN, MESSENGER.

DEIRDRE:

A DRAMA IN THREE ACTS.

ACT I.

SCENE—The Dún of Deirdre's captivity. LAVARCAM, a Druidess, sits before the door in the open air. DEIRDRE comes out of the Dún.

Deirdre. Dear fostermother, how the spring is beginning! The music of the father's harp is awakening the flowers. Now the winter's sleep is over, and the spring flows from the lips of the harp. Do you not feel the thrill in the wind—a joy answering the trembling strings? Dear foster-mother, the spring and the music are in my heart!

Lavarcam. The harp has but three notes; and, after sleep and laughter, the last sound is of weeping.

Deirdre. Why should there be any sorrow while I am with you? I am happy here. Last night in a dream I saw the blessed Shée upon the mountains, and they looked on me with eyes of love.

[*An old herdsman enters, who bows before*
LAVARCAM.

Herdsman. Lady, the High King of Ulla is coming through the woods.

Lavarcam. Deirdre, go to the grianan for a little. You shall tell me your dream again, my child.

Deirdre. Why am I always hidden from the King's sight?—

Lavarcam. It is the King's will you should see no one except these aged servants.

Deirdre. Am I indeed fearful to look upon, fostermother? I do not think so, or you would not love me.

Lavarcam. It is the King's will.

Deirdre. Yet, why must it be so, fostermother? Why must I hide away? Why must I never leave the valley?

Lavarcam. It is the King's will.

[*While she is speaking CONCOBAR enters. He stands still and looks on DEIRDRE, DEIRDRE gazes on the King for a moment, and then covering her face with her hands, she flies into the dún. The herdsman goes out. LAVARCAM sees and bows before the King.*]

Concobar. Lady, is all well with you and your charge?

Lavarcam. All is well.

Concobar. Is there peace in Deirdre's heart?

Lavarcam. She is happy, not knowing a greater happiness than to roam the woods, or her

dreams of the immortal ones can bring her.

Concobar. Fate has not found her yet hidden in this valley.

Lavarcam. Her happiness is to be here. But she asks why must she never leave the glen. Her heart quickens within her. Like a bird she listens to the spring, and soon the valley will be narrow as a cage.

Concobar. I cannot open the cage. Less ominous the Red Swineherd at a feast than this beautiful child in Ulla. You know the words of the Druids at her birth.

Lavarcam. Aye, through her would come the destruction of the Red Branch. But sad is my heart, thinking of her lonely youth.

Concobar. The gods did not guide us how the ruin might be averted. The Druids would have slain her ; but I set myself against the wise ones, thinking in my heart that the chivalry of the Red Branch would be already gone if this child were slain. If we are to perish, it shall be nobly, and without any departure from the laws of our order. So I have hidden her away from men, hoping to stay the coming of fate.

Lavarcam. King, your mercy will return to you, and if any of the Red Branch fall, you will not fall.

Concobar. If her thoughts turned only to the

Shee, her heart would grow cold to the light love that warriors give. The Birds of Angus cannot breathe or sing their maddening song in the chill air that enfolds the wise. For this, Druidess, I made thee her fosterer. Has she learned to know that beauty of the ever-living ones, after which the earth fades, and no voice can call us back ?

Lavarcam. The immortals have appeared to her in vision, and looked on her with eyes of love.

Concobar. Her beauty is so great it would madden whole hosts, and turn them from remembrance of their duty. We must guard well the safety of the Red Branch. Druidess, you have seen with subtle eyes the shining life beyond this. But through the ancient traditions of Eri, which the bards have kept and woven into song, I have seen the shining law enter men's minds, and subdue the lawless into love of justice. A great tradition is shaping a heroic race ; and the gods who fought at Moytura are descending and dwelling in the hearts of the Red Branch ; and deeds will be done in our time as mighty as those wrought by the giants who battled at the dawn ; and through the memory of our days and deeds, the gods will build themselves an eternal empire in the mind of the Gael. Wise woman, guard well this beauty which fills my heart with terror. I go now, and will doubly warn the spearmen at the passes, but will come hither again, and

speak with thee of these things ; and with Deirdre I would also speak.

Lavarcam. King of Ulla, be at peace. It is not I who will break through the design of the gods. (*CONCOBAR goes through the woods, after looking for a time at the door of the dún.*) But Deirdre is also one of the immortals. What the gods desire will utter itself through her heart. I will seek counsel from the gods.

[DEIRDRE comes slowly through the door.

Deirdre. Is he gone? I fear this stony King with his implacable eyes.

Lavarcam. He is implacable only in his desire for justice.

Deirdre. No ! No ! There is a hunger in his eyes for I know not what.

Lavarcam. He is the wisest king who ever sat on the chair of Macha.

Deirdre. He has placed a burden on my heart. Oh ! fostermother, the harp of life is already trembling into sorrow !

Lavarcam. Do not think of him. Tell me your dream, my child.

[DEIRDRE comes from the door of the dún, and sits on a deerskin at LAVARCAM'S feet.

Deirdre. Tell me, do happy dreams bring hap-

piness, and do our dreams of the Shee ever grow real to us as you are real to me? Do their eyes draw nigh to ours, and can the heart we dream of ever be a refuge for our hearts.

Lavarcam. Tell me your dream.

Deirdre. Nay; but answer me, first of all, dear fostermother, you who are wise, and who have talked with the Shee.

Lavarcam. Would it make you happy to have your dream real, my darling?

Deirdre. Oh, it would make me happy!

[*She hides her face on LAVARCAM'S knees.*]

Lavarcam. If I can make your dream real, I will, my beautiful fawn.

Deirdre. Dear fostermother, I think my dream is coming near to me. It is coming to me now.

Lavarcam. Deirdre, tell me what hope has entered your heart?

Deirdre. In the night I saw in a dream the top of the mountain yonder, beyond the woods, and three hunters stood there in the dawn. The sun set its breath upon their faces, but there was a light about them never kindled at the sun. They were surely hunters from some heavenly field, or the three gods whom Lu condemned to wander in mortal form, and they are come again to the world to seek some greater treasure.

Lavarcam. Describe to me these immortal hunters. In Eire we know no gods who take such shape appearing unto men.

Deirdre. I cannot now make clear to thee my remembrance of two of the hunters—but the tallest of the three—oh, he stood like a flame against the flameless sky, and the whole sapphire of the heavens seemed to live in his fearless eyes ! His hair was darker than the raven's wing ; his face dazzling in its fairness. He pointed with his great flame-bright spear to the valley. His companions seemed in doubt, and pointed east and west. Then in my dream I came nigh him, and whispered in his ear, and pointed the way through the valley to our dún. I looked into his eyes, and he started like one who sees a vision ; and I know, dear fostermother, he will come here ; and he will love me. Oh, I would die if he did not love me !

Lavarcam. Make haste, my child, and tell me was there aught else memorable about this hero and his companions ?

Deirdre. Yes, I remember each had the likeness of a torch shedding rays of gold embroidered on the breast.

Lavarcam. Deirdre, Deirdre, these are no phantoms, but living heroes ! O wise King, the eyes of the spirit thou wouldst open have seen further than the eyes of the body thou wouldst

blind ! The Druid vision has only revealed to this child her destiny.

Deirdre. Why do you talk so strangely, foster-mother ?

Lavarcam. Concobar, I will not fight against the will of the immortals. I am not thy servant, but theirs. Let the Red Branch fall ! If the gods scatter it, they have chosen to guide the people of Ulla in another path.

Deirdre. What has disturbed your mind, dear foster-mother ? What have I to do with the Red Branch ? And why should the people of Ulla fall because of me ?

Lavarcam. O, Deirdre, there were no warriors created could overcome the Red Branch. The gods have but smiled on this proud chivalry through thine eyes ; and they are already melted. The waving of thy hand is more powerful to subdue than the silver rod of the King to sustain. Thy golden hair shall be the flame to burn up Ulla.

Deirdre. Oh, what do you mean by these fateful prophecies ? You fill me with terror. Why should a dream so gentle and sweet portend sorrow ?

Lavarcam. Dear golden head, cast sorrow aside for a time. The Father has not yet struck the last chords on the harp of life. The chords of joy have but begun for thee.

Deirdre. You confuse my mind, dear foster-mother, with your speech of joy and sorrow. It is not your wont. Indeed, I think my dream portends joy.

Lavarcam. It is love, Deirdre, which is coming to thee. Love, which thou has never known.

Deirdre. But I love thee, dearest and kindest of guardians.

Lavarcam. Oh, in this love heaven and earth will be forgotten, and your own self unremembered or dim and far off as a home the spirit lives in no longer.

Deirdre. Tell me, will the hunter from the hills come to us? I think I could forget all for him.

Lavarcam. He is not one of the Shee, but the proudest and bravest of the Red Branch, Naisi, son of Usna. 'Three lights of valour among' the Ultonians are Naisi and his brothers.

Deirdre. Will he love me, fostermother, as you love me, and will he live with us here?

Lavarcam. Nay; where he goes, you must go, and he must fly afar to live with you. But I will leave you now for a little, child. I would divine the future. [*LAVARCAM kisses DEIRDRE, and goes within the dún. DEIRDRE walks to and fro before the door. NAISI enters. He sees DEIRDRE who turns and looks at him, pressing her hands to her breast. NAISI bows before DEIRDRE,*

Naisi. Goddess, or enchantress, thy face shone on me at dawn on the mountain. Thy lips called me hither, and I have come.

Deirdre. I called thee, dear *Naisi*.

Naisi. Oh, knowing my name, never before having spoken to me, thou must know my heart also.

Deirdre. Nay, I know not. Tell me what is in thy heart?

Naisi. O, enchantress, thou art there. The image of thine eyes is there, and thy smiling lips; and the beating of my heart is muffled in a cloud of thy golden tresses.

Deirdre. Say on, dear *Naisi*.

Naisi. I have told thee all. Thou only art in my heart.

Deirdre. But I have never ere this spoken to any man. Tell me more.

Naisi. If thou hast never before spoken to any man, then indeed art thou one of the immortals. and my hope is vain. Hast thou only called me to thy world to extinguish my life hereafter in memories of thee?

Deirdre. What wouldst thou with me, dear *Naisi*?

Naisi. I would carry thee to my dún by the sea of Moyle, O beautiful woman, and set thee there on an ivory throne. The winter would not

chill thee there, nor the summer burn thee, for I would enfold thee with my love, enchantress, if thou camest to my world. Many warriors are there of the clan Usna, and two brothers I have who are strong above any hosts, and they would all die with me for thy sake.

Deirdre (taking the hands of NAISI.) I will go with thee where thou goest (*leaning her head on NAISI'S shoulder*). Oh, fostermother, too truly hast thou spoken! I know myself not. My spirit has gone from me to this other heart for ever.

Naisi. Dost thou forego thy shining world for me?

Lavarcam (coming out of the dún). Naisi, this is the Deirdre of the prophecies.

Naisi. Deirdre! Deirdre! I remember in some old tale of my childhood that name. (*Fiercely.*) It was a lying prophecy. What has this golden head to do with the downfall of Ulla?

Lavarcam. Thou art the light of the Ultonians, Naisi, but thou art not the star of knowledge. The Druids spake truly. Through her, but not through her sin, will come the destruction of the Red Branch.

Naisi. I have counted death as nothing battling for the Red Branch; and I would not, even for Deirdre, war upon my comrades. But Deirdre I will not leave nor forget for a thousand prophecies

made by Druids in their dotage. If the Red Branch must fall, it will fall through treachery ; but Deirdre I will love, and in my love is no dishonour, nor any broken pledge.

Lavarcam. Remember, Naisi, the law of the King. It is death to thee to be here. Concobar is even now in the woods, and will come hither again.

Deirdre. Is it death to thee to love me, Naisi ? O, fly quickly, and forget me. But first, before thou goest, bend down thy head—low—rest it on my bosom. Listen to the beating of my heart. That passionate tumult is for thee ! There—I have kissed thee. I have sweet memories for everlasting. Go now, my beloved, quickly. I fear—I fear for thee this stony King.

Naisi. I do not fear the King, nor will I fly hence. It is due also to the chief of the Red Branch that I should stay, and face him, having set my will against his.

Lavarcam. You cannot remain now.

Naisi. It is due to the King.

Lavarcam. You must go ; both must go. Oh, do not cloud your heart with dreams of a false honour. It is not your death only, but Deirdre's which will follow. Do you think the Red Branch would spare her, after your death, to extinguish another light of valour, and another who may wander here ?

Naisi. I will go with Deirdre to Alba.

Deirdre. Through life, or to death. I will go with thee, Naisi.

[*Voices of AINLE and ARDAN are heard in the wood.*]

Ardan. I think Naisi went this way.

Ainle. He has been wrapt in a dream since the dawn. See ! This is his footstep in the clay !

Ardan. I heard voices.

Ainle (*entering with ARDAN*). Here is our dream-led brother——

Naisi. Ainle and Ardan, this is Deirdre, your sister. I have broken through the command of the King, and fly with her to Alba, to avoid warfare with the Red Branch.

Ardan. Our love to thee, beautiful sister.

Ainle. Dear maiden, thou art already in my heart with Naisi.

Layarcam. You cannot linger here. With Concobar the deed follows swiftly the counsel ; to-night his spearmen will be on your track.

Naisi. Listen, Ainle and Ardan. Go you to Emain Macha. It may be, the Red Branch will make peace between the King and myself. You at least are guiltless in this flight.

Ainle. Having seen Deirdre, my heart is with you, brother, and I also am guilty.

Ardan. I think, being here, we, too, have broken the command of the King. We will go with thee to Alba, dear brother and sister.

Lavarcam. Oh, tarry not ! tarry not ! Make haste while there is yet time. The thoughts of the King are circling around Deirdre as wolves around the fold. Try not the passes of the valley, but over the hills. The passes are all filled with the spearmen of the King.

Naisi. We will carry thee over the mountain, Deirdre, and to-morrow will see us nigh to the Isles of Alba.

Deirdre. Farewell, dear fostermother. I have passed the fairy sea since dawn, and have found the Island of Joy. Oh, see ! what bright birds are around us with dazzling wings ! Can you not hear their singing ? Oh, bright birds, make music for ever around my love and me !

Lavarcam. They are the Birds of Angus. Their singing brings love and death.

Deirdre. Nay, death has come before love, dear fostermother, and all I was has vanished like a dew-drop in the sea. Oh, beloved, let us go. We are leaving death behind us in the valley.

[*DEIRDRE and the brothers go through the wood, LAVARCAM watches, and when they are out of sight, sits by the door of the dún with her head bowed to her knees.*]

After a little, CONCOBAR enters.

Concobar. Where is Deirdre ?

Lavarcam (*not lifting her head*). Deirdre has left death behind her, and has entered into the Kingdom of her Youth.

Concobar. Do not speak to me in portents. Lift up your head, Druidess. Where is Deirdre ?

Lavarcam (*looking up*). Deirdre is gone !

Concobar. By the high gods, tell me whither ; and who has dared to take her hence ?

Lavarcam. She has fled with Naisi, son of Usna, and is beyond your vengeance, King.

Concobar. Woman, I swear by Balor, Tethra, and all the brood of demons, I will have such a vengeance a thousand years hereafter shall be frightened at the tale. If the Red Branch is to fall, it will sink at least in seas of the blood of the clan Usna.

Lavarcam. O King, the doom of the Red Branch had already gone forth, when you suffered love for Deirdre to enter your heart.

[SCENE CLOSES.]

ACT II.

SCENE—In a Dún by Loch Etive. Through the open door can be seen the lakes and wooded islands in a silver twilight, DEIRDRE stands at the door looking over the lake. NAISI is within binding a spear-head to the shaft.

Deirdre. How still is the twilight ! It is the sunset, not of one, but of many days—so still, so still, so living ! The enchantment of Dana is upon the lakes and islands and woods, and the Great Father looks down through the deepening heavens.

Naisi. Thou art half of their world, beautiful woman, and it seems fair to me, gazing on thine eyes. But when thou art not beside me, the flashing of spears is more to be admired than a whole heavenful of stars.

Deirdre. O, Naisi ! still dost thou long for the Red Branch, and the perils of battle and death.

Naisi. Not for the Red Branch, nor the peril of battles, nor death do I long. But——

Deirdre. But what, Naisi ? What memory of Eri hast thou hoarded in thy heart ?

Naisi (bending over his spear). It is nothing, Deirdre.

Deirdre. It is a night of many days, Naisi. See, all the bright day had hidden is revealed ! Look, there ! A star ! and another star ! They could not see each other through the day, for the hot

mists of the sun were about them. Three years of the sun have we passed in Alba, Naisi ; and now, O star of my heart, truly do I see you, this night of many days.

Naisi. Though my breast lay clear as a crystal before thee, thou couldst see no change in my heart.

Deirdre. There is no change, beloved ; but I see there one memory warring on thy peace.

Naisi. What is it then, wise woman ?

Deirdre. O, Naisi, I have looked within thy heart, and thou hast there imagined a King with scornful eyes thinking of thy flight.

Naisi. By the gods, but it is true ! I would give this kingdom I have won in Alba to tell the proud monarch I fear him not.

Deirdre. O, Naisi, that thought will draw thee back to Eri, and to I know not what peril and death beyond the seas.

Naisi. I will not war on the Red Branch. They were ever faithful comrades. Be at peace, Deirdre.

Deirdre. Oh, how vain it is to say to the heart, "Be at peace," when the heart will not rest ! Sorrow is on me, beloved, and I know not wherefore. It has taken the strong and fast place of my heart, and sighs there hidden in my love for thee.

Naisi. Dear one, the songs of Ainle and the pleasant tales of Ardan will drive away thy sorrow.

Deirdre. Ainle and Ardan ! Where are they ?
They linger long.

Naisi. They were watching a sail that set hitherward from the south.

Deirdre. A sail !

Naisi. A sail ! What is there to startle thee in that ? Have not a thousand galleys lain in Loch Etive since I built this dún by the sea.

Deirdre. I do not know, but my spirit died down in my heart as you spake. I think the wind that brings it blows from Eri, and it is it has brought sorrow to me.

Naisi. My beautiful one, it is but a fancy. It is some merchant comes hither to barter Tyrian cloths for the cunning work of our smiths. But glad would I be it he came from Eri, and I would feast him here for a night, and sit round a fire of turves, and hear of the deeds of the Red Branch.

Deirdre. Your heart for ever goes out to the Red Branch, Naisi. Were there any like unto thee, or Ainle, or Ardan ?

Naisi. We were accounted most skilful, but no one was held to be braver than another. If there were one, it was great Fergus, who laid aside the silver rod which he held as Ardrie of Ulla, but he is in himself greater than any King.

Deirdre. And does one hero draw your heart back to Eri ?

Naisi. A river of love, indeed, flows from my heart unto Fergus, for there is no one more noble. But there were many others, Conal, and the boy we called Cuculain, a dark, sad child, who was the darling of the Red Branch, and truly he seemed like one who would be a world-famous warrior. There were many held him to be a god in exile.

Deirdre. I think we, too, are in exile in this world. But tell me who else among the Red Branch do you think of with love?

Naisi. There was the Ardrie, Concobar, whom no man knows, indeed, for he is unfathomable. But he is a wise king, though moody and passionate at times, for he was cursed in his youth for a sin against one of the Shee.

Deirdre. Oh, do not speak of him! My heart falls at the thought of him as into a grave; and I know I will die when we meet.

Naisi. I know one who will die before that, my fawn.

Deirdre. Naisi! You remember when we fled that night; as I lay by thy side—thou were yet strange to me—I heard voices speaking out of the air. The great ones were invisible, yet their voices sound solemnly. “Our brother and our sister do not remember,” one said; and another spake: “They will serve the purpose all the same”; and there was more which I could not

understand, but I knew we were to bring some great gift to the Gael. Yester-night, in a dream, I heard the voices again ; and I cannot recall what they said, but as I woke from sleep my pillow was wet with tears falling softly, as out of another world ; and I saw before me thy face, pale and still, Naisi ; and the King, with his implacable eyes. Oh, pulse of my heart, I know the great gift we will give to the Gael will be a memory to pity and sigh over ; and I shall be the priestess of tears. Naisi, promise me you will never go back to Ulla—swear to me, Naisi.

Naisi. I will, if——

[*Here AINLE and ARDAN enter.*

Ainle. Oh, great tidings, brother !

Deirdre. I feel fate is stealing on us with the footsteps of those we love. Before they speak, promise me, Naisi.

Ainle. What is it, dear sister ? Naisi will promise thee anything, and if he does not, we will make him do it, all the same.

Deirdre. O, let me speak ! Both Death and the Heart's Desire are speeding to win the race. Promise me, Naisi, you will never return to Ulla.

Ardan. Naisi, it were well to hear what tale may come from Emain Macha. One of the Red Branch displays our banner on a galley from the

south. I have sent a boat to bring this warrior to our door. It may be Concobar is dead.

Deirdre. Why should we return? Is not the Clan Usna greater here than ever in Eiri?

Ainle. Dear sister, it is the land which gave us birth; which ever like a mother whispered to us, and its whisper is sweeter than the promise of beloved lips. Though we are kings here in Alba, we are exiles, and the heart is afar from its home.

[Distant shout is heard.]

Naisi. I hear a call like the voice of a man of Eri.

Deirdre. It is only a herdsman calling home his cattle. (*She puts her arms round Naisi's neck.*) Beloved, am I become so little to you that your heart is empty, and sighs for Eri?

Naisi. Deirdre, in my flight I have brought with me many whose desire is afar, while you are set as a star by my side. They have left their own land, and many a maiden sighs for the clansmen who never return. There is also the shadow of fear on my name, because I fled, and did not face the King. Shall I swear to keep my comrades in exile, and let the shame of fear rest on the Chieftain of their Clan?

Deirdre. Can they not go? Are we not enough for each other, for surely to me thou art hearth and home, and where thou art, there the dream

ends, and beyond it there is no other dream.

[A voice is heard without more clearly, calling.]

Ainle. It is a familiar voice that calls ! And I thought I heard thy name, Naisi.

Ardan. It is the honey-sweet speech of a man of Eri.

Deirdre. It is one of our own clansmen. Naisi, will you not speak ? The hour is passing, and soon there will be naught but a destiny.

Fergus (without). Naisi ! Naisi !

Naisi. A deep voice like the roar of a storm-god. It is Fergus who comes from Eri.

Ardan. He comes as a friend. There is no treachery in the Red Branch.

Ainle. Let us meet him, and give him welcome.

[The brothers go to the door of the dún.]

DEIRDRE leans against the wall with terror in her eyes.

Deirdre (in a low, broken voice). Naisi ! (NAISI returns to her side. AINLE and ARDAN go out. DEIRDRE rests one hand on NAISI'S shoulders and with the other points upwards, Do you not see them ? The bright birds which sang at our flight ! Look, how they wheel about us as they sing ! What a heart-rending music ! And their plumage, Naisi ! It is all dabbled with crimson ; and they shake a ruddy dew from their wings upon us ! Your brow

is stained with the drops. Let me clear away the stains. They pour over your face and hands. Oh !

[She hides her face on NAISI's breast.]

Naisi. Poor, frightened one, there are no birds ! See, how clear are my hands ! Look again on my face.

Deirdre (looking up for an instant). Oh ! blind, staring eyes.

Naisi. Nay, they are filled with love, light of of my heart. What has troubled your mind ? Am I not beside you, and a thousand clansmen around our dún ?

Deirdre. They go——and the music dies out. What was it Lavarcam said ?—"Their singing brings love and death".

Naisi. What matters death, for love will find us among the Ever Living ones. We are immortals, and it does not become us to grieve.

Deirdre. Naisi, there is some treachery in the coming of Fergus.

Naisi. I say to you, Deirdre, that treachery is not to be spoken of with Fergus. He was my fosterer, who taught me all a chieftain should feel, and I shall not now accuse him on the foolish fancy of a woman. *(He turns from DEIRDRE, and as he nears the door, FERGUS enters with hands laid affectionately on a shoulder of each of the brothers ;*

BUINNE and ILANN follow.) Welcome, Fergus !
Glad is my heart at your coming, whether you
bring good tidings or ill !

Fergus. I would not have crossed the Sea of
Moyle to bring thee ill tidings, Naisi. (*He sees*
DEIRDRE.) My coming has affrighted thy lady, who
shakes like the white wave trembling before its fall.
I swear to thee, Deirdre, that the Sons of Usna are
dear to me as children to a father.

Deirdre. The Birds of Angus showed all fiery
and crimson as you came.

Buinne. If we are not welcome in this dún, let
us return.

Fergus. Be still, hasty boy.

Ilann. The Lady Deirdre has received some
omen or warning on our account. When the Shee
declare their will, we should with due awe con-
sider it.

Ardan. Her mind has been troubled by a dream
of some ill to Naisi.

Naisi. It was not by dreaming evils that the
Sons of Usna grew to be champions in Ulla. And
I took thee to my heart, Deirdre, though the
Druids trembled to murmur thy name.

Fergus. If we listened to dreamers and foretellers,
the sword would never flash from its sheath. In truth,
I have never found the Shee send omens to warriors ;
they rather bid them fly to herald our coming.

Deirdre And what doom comes with thee now, that such omens fled before thee? I fear thy coming, warrior. I fear the Lights of Valour will be soon extinguished.

Fergus. Thou shalt smile again, pale princess, when thou hast heard my tale. It is not to the Sons of Usna I would bring sorrow. Naisi, thou art free to return to Ulla.

Naisi. Does the King, then, forego his vengeance?

Deirdre. The King will never forego his vengeance. I have looked on his face—the face of one who never changes his purpose.

Fergus. He sends forgiveness and greetings.

Deirdre. O, Naisi, he sends honied words by the mouth of Fergus, but the pent-up death broods in his own heart.

Buinne. We were tempest-beaten, indeed, on the sea of Moyle; but the storm of this girl's speech is more fearful to face.

Fergus. Your tongue is too swift, Buinne. I say to you, Deirdre, that if all the Kings of Eri brooded ill to Naisi, they dare not break through my protection.

Naisi. It is true, indeed, Fergus, though I have never asked any protection save my own sword. It is a chill welcome you give to Fergus and his sons, Deirdre. Ainle, tell them within to make ready the feasting hall. [AINLE goes into an inner room.

Deirdre. I pray thy pardon, warrior. Thy love for Naisi, I do not doubt. But in this holy place there is peace, and the doom that Cathvah the Druid cried cannot fall. And oh, I feel, too, there is One here among us who pushes us silently from the place of life; and we are drifting away—away—from the world, on a tide which goes down into the darkness!

Ardan. The darkness is in your mind alone, poor sister. Great is our joy to hear the message of Fergus.

Naisi. It is not like the King to change his will. Fergus, what has wrought upon his mind?

Fergus. He took counsel with the Druids and Lavarcam, and thereafter spake at Emain Macha, that for no woman in the world should the sons of Usna be apart from the Red Branch. And so we all spake joyfully; and I have come with the King's message of peace, for he knew that for none else wouldst thou return.

Naisi. Surely, I will go with thee, Fergus. I long for the shining eyes of friends, and the fellowship of the Red Branch, and to see my own country by the Sea of Moyle. I weary of this barbarous people in Alba.

Deirdre. O children of Usna, there is death in your going! Naisi, will you not stay the storm bird of sorrow? I forehear the falling of tears that

cease not, and in generations unborn the sorrow of it all that will never be stilled !

Naisi. Deirdre ! Deirdre ! It is not right for you, beautiful woman, to come with tears between a thousand exiles and their own land ! Many battles have I fought, knowing well there would be death and weeping after. If I feared to trust to the word of great kings and warriors, it is not with tears I would be remembered. What would the bards sing of Naisi—without trust !—afraid of the outstretched hand !—frightened by a woman's fears !—by the gods, before the Clan Usna were so shamed I would shed my blood here with my own hand.

Deirdre. O, stay—stay your anger ! Have pity on me, Naisi. Your words, like hot lightnings, sear my heart. Never again will I seek to stay thee. But speak to me with love once more, Naisi. Do not bend your brows on me with anger ; for, oh ! but a little time remains for us to love !

Fergus. Nay, Deirdre, there are many years. Thou shalt yet smile back on this hour in thy old years thinking of the love and laughter between.

Ainle (*entering*). The feast is ready for our guests.

Ardan. The bards shall sing of Eri to-night. Let the harpers sound their gayest music. Oh, to be back once more in royal Emain !

Naisi. Come, Deirdre, forget thy fears. Come,

Fergus, I long to hear from thy lips of the Red Branch and Ulla.

Fergus. It is geasa with me not to refuse a feast offered by one of the Red Branch.

[FERGUS, BUINNE, ILANN, and the sons of Usna go into the inner room. DEIRDRE remains silently standing for a time, as if stunned. The sound of laughter and music floats in. She goes to the door of the dún, looking out again over the lakes and islands.

Deirdre. Farewell, O home of happy memories. Though thou art bleak to Naisi, to me thou art bright. I shall never see thee more, save as shadows we wander here, weeping over what has gone. Farewell, O gentle people, who made music for me on the hills. The Father has struck the last chord on the Harp of Life; and the music I will hear hereafter shall be only sorrow. O, Mother Dana, who breathed up love through the dim earth to my heart, be with me where I am going. Soon shall I lie close to thee for comfort, where many a broken heart has lain, and many a weeping head.

[*Music of harps and laughter again floats in.*

Voices. Deirdre ! Deirdre ! Deirdre !

[DEIRDRE *leaves the door of the dún, and the scene closes as she flings herself on a couch burying her face in her arms.*

ACT III.

SCENE---The house of the Red Branch at Emain Macha.
There is a door covered with curtains, through which the blue light of evening can be seen.
CONCOBAR sits at a table on which is a chess-board, with figures arranged. LAVARCAM stands before the table.

Concobar. The air is dense with omens, but all is uncertain. Cathvah, for all his Druid art, is uncertain, and cannot foresee the future ; and in my dreams, too, I again see Macha, who died at my feet, and she passes by me with a secret exultant smile. O, Druidess, is the sin of my boyhood to be avenged by this woman, who comes back to Eri in a cloud of prophecy ?

Lavarcam. The great beauty has passed from Deirdre in her wanderings from place to place, and from island to island. Many a time has she slept on the bare earth ere Naisi won a kingdom for himself in Alba. Surely, the prophecy has already been fulfilled, for blood has been shed for Deirdre, and the Red Branch divided on her account. To Naisi, the Red Branch are as brothers. Thou hast naught to fear.

Concobar. Well, I have put aside my fears, and taken thy counsel, Druidess. For the sake of the Red Branch I have forgiven the sons of Usna. Now, I will call together the warriors of Ulla, for

it is my purpose to bring the five provinces under the sway of the Red Branch, and there shall be but one kingdom in Eri between the seas. (*A distant shouting of many voices is heard.* LAVARCAM starts clasp^{ing} her hands.) Why dost thou start, Druidess? Was it not foretold from of old that the gods would rule over one people in Eri? I sometimes think the warrior soul of Lu shines through the boy Cuculain, who, after me, shall guide the Red Branch; aye, and with him are many of the old company who fought at Moytura, come back to renew the everlasting battle. Is not this the Isle of Destiny, and the hour at hand? (*The clamour is again renewed.*) What is this clamour as if men hailed a King? (*Calls.*) Is there one without there? (*ILANN enters.*) Ah! returned from Alba with the fugitives?

Ilann. King, we have fulfilled our charge. The sons of Usna are with us in Emain Macha. Whither is it your pleasure they should be led?

Concobar. They shall be lodged here in the house of the Red Branch. (*ILANN is about to withdraw.*) Yet, wait, what mean all these cries as of astonished men?

Ilann. The lady, Deirdre, has come with us, and her beauty is a wonder to the gazers in the streets, for she moves among them like one of the Shee, whiter than ivory, with long hair of gold, and

her eyes, like the blue flame of twilight, make mystery in their hearts.

Concobar (*starting up*.) This is no fading beauty who returns! You hear, Druidess!

Ilann. Ardrie of Ulla, whoever has fabled to thee that the beauty of Deirdre is passed has lied. She is sorrowful, indeed, but her sadness only bows the heart to more adoration than her joy, and pity for her seems sweeter than the dream of love. Fading! Yes, her yesterday fades behind her every morning, and every changing mood seems only an unveiling to bring her nearer to the golden spirit within. But how could I describe Deirdre? In a little while she will be here, and you shall see her with your own eyes.

[*Ilann bows and goes out.*]

Concobar. I will, indeed, see her with my own eyes. I will not, on the report of a boy, speak words that shall make the Red Branch to drip with blood. I will see with my own eyes. (*He goes to the door*). But I swear to thee, Druidess, if thou hast plotted deceit a second time with Naisi, that all Eri may fall asunder, but I will be avenged.

[*He holds the curtain aside with one hand and looks out. As he gazes, his face grows sterner, and he lifts his spear above his head in menace. LAVARCAM looks on with terror, and as he drops the curtain*

and looks back on her she lets her face sink in her hands.

Concobar (scornfully). A Druid makes prophecies, and a Druidess schemes to bring them to pass ! Well have you all worked together ! A fading beauty was to return, and the lights of Valour to shine again in the Red Branch ! And I, the Ardrie of Ulla and the head of the Red Branch, to pass by the broken law and the after deceit ! I, whose sole thought was of the building up of a people, to be set aside ! The high gods may judge me hereafter, but to-night shall see the broken law set straight, and vengeance on the traitors to Ulla.

Lavarcam. It was all my doing ! They are innocent ! I loved Deirdre, O King ! Let your anger be on me alone.

Concobar. Oh, tongue of falsehood ! Who can believe you ! The fate of Ulla was in your charge, and you let it go forth at the instant wish of a man and a girl's desire. The fate of Ulla was too distant, and you must bring it nigher—the torch to the pile ! Breakers of the law, and makers of lies, you shall all perish together !

[*CONCOBAR leaves the room. LAVARCAM remains, her whole being shaken with sobs. After a pause, NAISI enters with DEIRDRE. AINLE, ARDAN, ILANN and BUINNE follow. During the dialogue*

which ensues, NAISI is inattentive, and is curiously examining the chess-board.

Deirdre. We are entering a house of death ! Who is it that weeps so ? I, too, would weep, but the children of Usna are too proud to let tears be seen in the eyes of their women. (*She sees Lavarcam, who raises her head from the table*). O, fostermother, for whom do you sorrow ? Ah ! it is for us. You still love me, dear fostermother ; but you, who are wise—could you not have warned the Lights of Valour ? Was it kind to keep silence, and only meet us here with tears ?

Lavarcam. O, Deirdre, my child ! my darling ! I have let love and longing blind my eyes. I left the mountain home of the gods for Emain Macha, and to plot for your return. I—I deceived the King. I told him your loveliness was passed, and the time of the prophecy gone by. I thought when you came all would be well. I thought wildly, for love had made a blindness in my heart ; and now the King has discovered the deceit ; and, oh ! he is gone away in wrath, and soon his terrible hand will fall !

Deirdre. It was not love made you all blind, but the high gods have deserted us, and the demons draw us into a trap. They have lured us from Alba, and they hover here above us in red clouds—cloud upon cloud—and await the sacrifice.

Lavarcam. Oh, it is not yet too late! Where is Fergus? The King dare not war on Fergus. Fergus is our only hope.

Deirdre. Fergus has bartered his honour for the feast. He remained with Baruch, that he might boast he never refused the wine cup. He feasts with Baruch, and the Lights of Valour who put their trust in him—must die.

Buinne. Fergus never bartered his honour. I do protest, girl, against your speech. The name of Fergus alone would protect you throughout all Eri; how much more here, where he is champion in Ulla. Come, brother, we are none of us needed here.

[*BUINNE leaves the room.*]

Deirdre. Father and son alike desert us! O fostermother, is this the end of all? Is there no way out? Is there no way out?

Ilann. I will not desert you, Deirdre, while I can still thrust a spear. But you fear overmuch without a cause.

Lavarcam. Bar up the door, and close the windows. I will send a swift messenger for Fergus. If you hold the dun until Fergus comes, all will yet be well.

[*LAVARCAM hurries out.*]

Deirdre (going to Naisi). Naisi, do you not hear? Let the door be barred! Ainle and Ardan, are you

still all blind ? Oh ! must I close them with my own hand !

[DEIRDRE goes to the window, and lays her hand on the bars. NAISI follows her.

Naisi. Deirdre, in your girlhood you have not known of the ways of the Red Branch. This thing you fear is unheard of in Ulla. The King may be wrathful ; but the word once passed, is inviolable. If he whispered treachery to one of the Red Branch he would not be Ardrie to-motrow. Nay, leave the window unbarred, or they will say the sons of Usna have returned timid as birds ! Come, we are enough protection for thee. See, here is the chess-board of Concobar, with which he is wont to divine, playing a lonely game with fate. The pieces are set. We will finish the game, and so pass the time until the feast is ready. (*He sits down*). The golden pieces are yours and the silver mine.

Ainle (looking at the board). You have given Deirdre the weaker side.

Naisi. Deirdre always plays with more cunning skill.

Deirdre. Oh, fearless one, if he who set the game played with fate the victory is already fixed, and no skill may avail.

Naisi. We will see if Concobar has favourable

omens. It is geasa for him always to play with silver pieces. I will follow his game. It is your move. Dear one, will you not smile? Surely, against Concobar you will play well.

Deirdre. It is too late. See, everywhere my king is threatened.

Ardan. Nay, your game is not lost. If you move your king back all will be well.

Messenger (at the door). I bear a message from the Ardrie to the sons of Usna.

Naisi. Speak out thy message, man. Why does thy voice tremble? Who art thou? I do not know thee. Thou art not one of the Red Branch. Concobar is not wont to send messages to Kings by such as thou.

Messenger. The Red Branch are far from Emain Macha ; but it matters not. The King has commanded me to speak thus to the sons of Usna. You have broken the law of Ulla when you stole away the daughter of Felim. You have broken the law of the Red Branch when you sent lying messages through Lavarcam plotting to return. The King commands that the daughter of Felim be given up, and——

Ainle. Are we to listen to this?

Ardan. My spear will fly of itself if he does not depart.

Naisi. Nay, brother ; he is only a slave. (*To*

the messenger). Return to Concobar, and tell him that to-morrow the Red Branch will choose another Chief. There ; why dost thou wait ? Begone ! (*To Deirdre*). Oh, wise woman, truly did you see the rottenness in this King !

Deirdre. Why did you not take my counsel, Naisi ? For now it is too late—too late.

Naisi. There is naught to fear. One of us could hold this dun against a thousand of Concobar's household slaves. When Fergus comes to-morrow there will be another King in Emain Macha.

Ilann. It is true, Deirdre. One of us is enough for Concobar's household slaves. I will keep watch at the door, while you play at peace with Naisi.

[*ILANN lifts the curtain of the door, and goes outside. The play at chess begins again. AINLE and ARDAN look on.*

Ainle. Naisi, you play wildly. See, your queen will be taken.

[*A disturbance without, and the clash of arms.*

Ilann (without). Keep back ! Do you dare ?

Naisi. Ah ! the slaves come on, driven by the false Airdrie ! When the game is finished, we will sweep them back, and slay them in the Royal

House, before Concobar's eyes. Play ! You forgot to move, Deirdre.

The clash of arms is renewed,

Ilann (without). Oh ! I am wounded. Ainle !
Ardan ! To the door !

AINLE and ARDAN rush out. The clash of arms again renewed.

Deirdre. Naisi, I cannot, I cannot. The end of all has come. Oh, Naisi.

[She flings her arms across the table, and scatters the pieces over the board.]

Naisi. If the end has come we should meet it with calm. It is not with sighing and tears the Clan Usna should depart. You have not played this game as it ought to be played.

Deirdre. Your pride is moulded and set like a pillar of bronze. O warrior, I was no mate for you. I am only a woman, who has given her life into your hands ; and you chide me for my love.

Naisi (caressing her head with his hands). Poor timid dove, I had forgotten thy weakness. I did not mean to wound thee, my heart. Oh, many will shed hotter tears than these for thy sorrow ! They will perish swiftly who made Naisi's queen to weep !

[He snatches up a spear and rushes out. There are cries, and then a silence.]

Lavarcam (*entering hurriedly*). Bear Deirdre swiftly away through the night. (*She stops and looks around*) Where are the Sons of Usna? Oh! I stepped over many dead bodies at the door. Surely the Lights of Valour were not so soon overcome! Oh, my darling, come away with me out of this terrible house.

Deirdre. (*slowly*). What did you say of the Lights of Valour? That —— they —— were dead ——?

[*NAISI, AINLE, and ARDAN re-enter.*
DEIRDRE clings to NAISI.

Naisi. My gentle one, do not look so pale, or wound me with those terror-stricken eyes. Those base slaves have all fled. Surely Concobar is a mighty King, without the Red Branch?

Lavarcam. Oh, do not linger here. Bear Deirdre away while there is time. You can escape through the city in the silence of the night. The King has called for his druids: soon the magic of Cathvah shall enfold you, and your strength will be all withered away.

Naisi. I will not leave Emain Macha until the head of this false King is apart from his shoulders. A spear can pass as swiftly through his druid as through one of his slaves. Oh, Cathvah, the old mumblor of spells and false prophecies, who caused Deirdre to be taken from her mother's breast!

Truly I owe a deep debt to Cathvah, and I will repay it.

Lavarcam. If you love Deirdre, do not let pride and wrath stay your flight. You have but an instant to fly. You can return with Fergus and a host of warriors in the dawn. You do not know the power of Cathvah. Surely, if you do not depart, Deirdre will fall into the King's hands, and it were better she had died in her mother's womb.

Deirdre. Naisi, let us leave this house of death.

[*The sound of footsteps without,*

Lavarcam. It is too late.

Cathvah (chanting without).

Let the Faed Fia fall,

Mananaun Mac Lir.

Take back the day

Amid days unremembered.

Over the warring mind

Let thy Faed Fia fall,

Mananaun Mac Lir !

Naisi. Why dost thou weep, Deirdre, and cling to me so ? The sea is calm. To-morrow we will rest safely at Emain Macha, with the great Airdrie, who has forgiven all.

Lavarcam. The darkness is upon his mind.

Oh, poor Deirdre !

Cathvah (without).

Let thy waves rise,

Mananaun Mac Lir,
Let the earth fail
Beneath their feet,
Let thy waves flow over them,
Mananaun :
Lord of ocean !

Naisi. Our galley is sinking—and no land in sight ! I did not think the end would come so soon. O pale love, take courage. Is death so bitter to you ? We shall go down in each other's arms ; our hearts shall beat out their love together ; and the last of life we shall know will be our kisses on each other's lips. (*AINLE and ARDAN stagger outside. There is a sound of blows and a low cry.*) Ainle and Ardan have sunk in the waters ! We are alone. Still weeping ! My bird, my bird, soon we shall fly together to the bright kingdom in the West, to Hy Brazil, amid the opal seas.

Deirdre. Naisi, Naisi, shake off the magic dream. It is here in Emain Macha we are. There are no waters. The spell of the Druid and his terrible chant has made a mist around your eyes.

Naisi. Her mind is wandering. She is distraught with terror of the King. There, rest your head on my heart. Hush ! hush ! The waters are flowing upwards swiftly. Soon, when all is over, you will laugh at your terror. The great Airdrie will sorrow over our death.

Deirdre. I cannot speak. Lavarcam, can you not break the enchantment?

Lavarcam. My limbs are fixed here by the spell.

Naisi. There was music a while ago. The swans of Lir, with their slow, sweet faery singing. There never was a sadder tale than theirs. They must roam for ages, driven on the Sea of Moyle, while we shall go hand in hand through the Country of Immortal Youth. And there is Mananaun, the dark blue King, who looks at us with a smile of welcome. Ildathach is lit up with its shining mountains, and the golden phantoms are leaping there in the dawn! There is a path made for us. Come, Deirdre, the god has made for us an island on the sea. (*NAISI goes through the door, and falls back, smitten by a spear thrust.*) The Druid Cathvah! The King!—— O Deirdre!——

[*He dies. DEIRDRE bends over the body, taking the hands in hers.*]

Lavarcam. O gentle heart, thy wounds will be more bitter than his. Speak but a word. That silent sorrow will kill thee and me. My darling, it was fate, and I was not to blame. Come, it will comfort thee to weep beside my breast. Leave the dead for vengeance, for heavy is the vengeance that will fall on this ruthless King.

Deirdre. I do not fear Concobar any more. My spirit is sinking away from the world. I could not

stay after Naisi. After the Lights of Valour had vanished, how could I remain? The earth has grown dim and old, fostermother. The gods have gone far away, and the lights from the mountains, and the Lions of the Flaming Heart are still. O fostermother, when they heap the cairn over him, let me be beside him in the narrow grave. I will still be with the noble one.

[DEIRDRE *lays her head on* NAISI'S *body.*

CONCOBAR *enters, standing in the doorway.* LAVARCAM *takes DEIRDRE'S hand and drops it.*

Lavarcam. Did you come to torture her with your presence? Was not the death of Naisi cruelty enough? But now she is past your power to wound.

Concobar. The death of Naisi was only the fulfilling of the law. Ulla could not hold together if its ancient laws were set aside.

Lavarcam. Do you think to bind men together when you have broken their hearts? Oh, fool, who would conquer all Eri? I see the Red Branch scattered, and Eri rent asunder, and thy memory a curse after many thousand years. The gods have overthrown thy dominion, proud King, with the last sigh from this dead child; and of the pity for her they will build up an eternal kingdom in the spirit of man.

[*An uproar without and the clash of arms.*

Voices. Fergus ! Fergus ! Fergus !

Lavarcam. The avenger has come ! So perishes
the Red Branch !

[She hurries out wildly,

Concobar (slowly, after a pause). I have two
divided kingdoms, and one is in my own heart.
Thus do I pay homage to thee, O Queen, who
will rule, being dead.

*[He bends over the body of DEIRDRE,
and kisses her hand.*

Fergus (without). Where is the traitor Ardrie ?

*[CONCOBAR starts up, lifting his spear.
FERGUS appears at the doorway.*

[THE SCENE CLOSES.]

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